6: Messing E-5 (1953-1954) 1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

539 and was always looking up intently and with concentration. One of his friends asked him, "What are you looking for?"

"*Mäwča,*" replied the wit in his classic manner. [The literal meaning is "exit," i.e., either the exit from the trail on the tiring climb, or "the place where we emerge" from the female body.]

The Wit At Home. Home in his hut in Gondar, AG-H was one day at dusk lying on his bed. [56] His wife had gone to the river to wash her private parts, as is the custom of the Amhara women at nightfall. Tired from the uphill climb from the valley, she rested before the hearth to dry herself, but dozed off. Soon AG-H heard a cannonade of farting, issuing from his half-conscious wife. He called out to her, "Where are you? Come to bed!"

Awakening, she said dazedly, "I am just drying myself."

To which he replied, "You are drying yourself so much that you are cracking apart."

[302] *A Woman's "Way."* [In accordance with ancient custom, women used to pluck out their pubic hair, rubbing ashes between their fingers to get a good grip while plucking.]

One day a girl student of AG-H was late for her lesson. Taking a quick short-cut across the back yard, she tumbled into the ash heap, soiling her lower toga and her legs with the ashes. She excused her appearance to her teacher, saying, "Oh, Master, I was so eager to come quickly, and now I have dirtied myself with ashes all over."

"That is *your way,*" nodded AG-H.

Only much later did the girl learn that he had meant not only the wrong way she had come, but was referring to the fact that being smudged with ashes was the natural "way" for a woman.

[564] *The Pot Of Caste.* [The women of the Falasha caste are makers of pottery, a despised occu-
[323] pation among the Coptic Amhara, though much appreciated by the Amhara, who buy all their better pots from them.]

The wife of AG-H, quarreling with a certain woman, accused her of being of Falasha ancestry and that her mother had been a pottery-maker. One day that woman returned from the river valley, carrying a large, full pot of water on her back. She saw AG-H sitting in front of his hut, and decided to take the opportunity to complain to him about the taunts of his wife.

AG-H disliked being involved in the petty quarreling of the womenfolk, but he listened quietly. As she took leave, he patted her full clay pot and said, "*This* is your work."

She thought that he meant she should not quarrel with his wife, should instead attend to her tasks of fetching water, cooking, etc. But on further reflection what had he meant? Had he accused her of being a pottery-maker herself?

Jealousy Is Dangerous. AG-H was also notorious for his prowess in bed and his fickleness in love.

One day his wife had to go far down to a valley to fetch water, since the dry season had left only water holes in the river bed. She left him in charge of their baby. Taking the baby with him, he went to the hut of his current girl friend and spent the afternoon making passionate love. As it happened, this woman also had a baby about the same age. Dusk came rapidly, and AG-H knew that his wife would soon be back. In the hurry, he took the wrong baby.

A moment after his return his wife arrived, laden with water pot and firewood. When she beheld the baby of her current rival, she became very angry and said, "This thing is not my baby! Shall I throw it in the fire?"

Calm as ever, AG-H replied: "There is a fire also in the house of his mother."

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